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## MISCELLANY

### THE STORY OF A FAILURE: THE OHIO VALLEY CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The strong impetus given to the historical sciences by the celebrated letter of Pope Leo XIII (1833), in which the Pontiff urged a stricter attention to the sources of Catholic history and for which he threw open the Archives at Rome, found a quick response from two Catholic centres of Pennsylvania,—Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. In July 1884, the *American Catholic Historical Society* was organized in Philadelphia, through the enthusiasm of a few scholars deeply interested in the work, chief of whom is that veteran research-worker, today a leader in his chosen field—the Very Rev. Dr. Middleton, O. S. A., of Villanova College. The Philadelphia Society has been a success from the beginning. Occasional volumes of its *Records* were published from 1887 to 1891; since then they have been issued as a quarterly magazine. The Society is now publishing the twenty-sixth volume of this valuable series; and from its fine old Colonial home on Spruce street, Philadelphia, it has been radiating not only through Pennsylvania but throughout the entire length of the United States its strong, steady light of zeal for this department of intelligent Catholic activity. In 1913, the Society took over and combined with the *Records* the *Researches* of the late lamented Mr. Griffin. In this way the pioneer efforts of another scholar still living, Monsignor Lambing of Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania, were carried on to success in Philadelphia after they had proved a failure in Pittsburgh.

No one who is at all familiar with the early history of Western Pennsylvania need be told how rich that section is in both secular and religious reminiscences. Its religious history begins with the expedition of Captain Louis Céloron, which passed down the Allegheny and Ohio rivers in August, 1749; but with the expulsion of the French in November, 1758, the Catholic history of Western Pennsylvania becomes somewhat fragmentary, until the reopening of the territory at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the different clusters of pioneer families in this region began to attract the attention of the missionaries. Shortly after his consecration as first Bishop of Pittsburgh (1843), the Right Reverend Michael O'Connor directed the clergy of the diocese to keep a careful record of all important events taking place in their respective parishes and missions. This provision was neglected, largely on account of the indifference of those concerned. There was one exception. Andrew Arnold Lambing, a descendant of one of the original six families that laid the first permanent foundation of Catholicity in Western Pennsylvania, was born at Manorville, Pennsylvania, in 1842. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1869, and from his first charge gave all his leisure time to historical research-work in and around Pittsburgh. In 1880,

he published a *History of the Catholic Church in the Dioceses of Pittsburgh and Allegheny*.

Shortly after the publication of Leo XIII's letter on Historical Studies, Father Lambing gathered a few friends around him, and on February 1, 1884, he organized the *Ohio Valley Catholic Historical Society*. In common with many others, Doctor Lambing had long felt that too little interest was being manifested by American Catholics in collecting and preserving the records of the past. He came to the conclusion that there should be a Catholic historical magazine in the United States, in which the early records of our religion could be preserved in a suitable form for future workers. "Let us," he said, "but transport ourselves forward a hundred years and reflect on the value that would then be attached to such a work and the depth of gratitude posterity would feel it owed us." He began a quarterly publication called *Historical Researches in Western Pennsylvania Principally Catholic*, the first number appearing in July, 1884. The subscription price was placed at one dollar a year. Through the courtesy of Miss Josephine O'Flynn, Librarian of the *American Catholic Historical Society* these rare numbers were placed at our disposal. The four numbers which appeared contained the following articles:

Vol. I, No. 1, July, 1884:

1. *Céloron's Expedition down the Allegheny and Ohio Rivers, 1749*, pp. 1-31.
2. *The Early Days of Catholicity in Pittsburgh*, pp. 32-36.
3. *Historical Library of the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh*, pp. 37-40.
4. *The First Printing Press in New World*, p. 40.

Vol. I, No. 2, October, 1884:

1. *The French in Western Pennsylvania in Early Times*, pp. 41-58.
2. *Register of the Baptisms and Interments which took Place at Fort Duquesne during the years 1753-1756*, pp. 60-73.
3. *The Early Days of Catholicity in Pittsburgh*, pp. 76-80.

Vol. I, No. 3, January, 1885:

1. *Points on the Early History of Pittsburgh*, pp. 81-98.
2. *The Acadians in Philadelphia*, pp. 98-102.
3. *Register of Baptisms, etc.*, pp. 102-118.

Vol. I, No. 4, April, 1885:

1. *The Establishment of the Catholic Hierarchy in the United States*, pp. 121-136.
2. *Did La Salle descend the Allegheny and Ohio Rivers, 1669-1670?*, p. 137.
3. *Register of Baptisms, etc.*, pp. 138-154.
4. *The Early Days of Catholicity in Pittsburgh*, 154-160.

This publication was then changed to the *Catholic Historical Researches*, the first number of which appeared in July, 1885. Doctor Lambing believed that in this way he could extend the scope of its activity to the whole country,

give greater variety to its contents and confine it to the investigation of matters relating to the Catholic religion. The contents of the *Catholic Historical Researches*, which ran for two years, are as follows:

Vol. II, No. 1, July, 1885:

1. *The Establishment of the See of Pittsburgh*, pp. 3-14.
2. *First See and Bishop on the American Continent*, pp. 14-16.
3. *Register of Baptisms, etc.* (ut supra), pp. 18-25.
4. *Notes, Original Documents, etc.*, pp. 25-32.
5. *Washington and the Catholics of the United States*, pp. 32-35.
6. *The Ohio Valley Catholic Historical Society of Pittsburgh*, pp. 38-39.
7. *The American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia*, pp. 39-40.
8. *The United States Catholic Historical Society of New York*, p. 40.

Vol. II, No. 2, October, 1885:

1. *Supposed Vestiges of Early Christian Teaching in the New World*, pp. 41-54.
2. *Gibault, the Patriot Priest*, pp. 54-60.
3. *Céloron's Journal*, pp. 60-76.
4. *The Site of Fort Duquesne*, p. 77.
5. *Original Documents, Notes, etc.*, pp. 78-80.

Vol. II, No. 3, January, 1886:

1. *New Hampshire Intolerance*, pp. 81-88.
2. *Necrology of the Diocese of Pittsburgh*, pp. 88-102.<sup>1</sup>
3. *Céloron's Journal*, 103-119.

Vol. II, No. 4, April, 1886:

1. *The Constitution of the United States and Religious Liberty*, pp. 121-131.
2. *Céloron's Journal*, pp. 132-46.
3. *Some Vicars-General of Philadelphia* (Middleton), pp. 146-147.
4. *A Century of Catholicity in Green County, Pennsylvania*, pp. 148-153.

Vol. III, No. 1, July, 1886:

1. *Stephen Badin, the Proto-priest of the United States*, pp. 1-13.
2. *Andrew White, S. J., the Apostle of Maryland*, pp. 13-20.

Vol. III, No. 2, October, 1886:

1. *Detroit in Early Times—Gabriel Richard*, pp. 41-58.
2. *Gallitzin*, pp. 58-68.
3. *The Famous Bull of Pope Alexander VI* (Latin and English), pp. 71-79.

The price of this quarterly was again kept to the modest sum of one dollar, but the support the work received was not sufficiently encouraging. The

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<sup>1</sup> The volume is here annotated with numerous lead-pencil and pen corrections in the handwriting of the late Mr. Griffin.

burden of research and of composition of the papers for the *Ohio Valley Catholic Historical Society* was practically left to Doctor Lambing alone. The consequence was that after struggling for a time against difficulties and discouragements, the attempt to form a permanent society was abandoned. It has never since been re-established. In December, 1886, Martin I. J. Griffin, of the Philadelphia Catholic Historical Society, purchased the *Catholic Historical Researches*, and published them as the *American Catholic Historical Researches* from that date until the time of his death, 1912.

The failure of the *Ohio Valley Catholic Historical Society* may be attributed to a number of causes. In 1879, some of the older citizens formed the *Old Residents' Association of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania*, composed of those who had spent at least fifty years in that part of the state. "A finer collection of gray heads has never been witnessed," we read in the *Synopsis of the Proceedings for the first five years* (Pittsburgh, 1889, p. 39). Doctor Lambing decided to form a distinctly Catholic society. As early as May, 1879, an effort was made, but it met with no encouragement. The idea, however, was not lost sight of. At length, on February 1, 1884, a meeting of prominent Catholics was called and the *Society* was organized with the following officers: *President*, Rev. A. A. Lambing; *First Vice-President*, Chas. F. M'Kenna; *Second Vice-President*, Dr. Geo. H. Keyser; *Third Vice-President*, John M. Molamphy; *Recording Secretary*, Prof. J. B. Sullivan; *Treasurer*, Titus Berger. The *Society* met once or twice and then decided to disband. The city of Pittsburgh and the surrounding district at this time resembled a vast workshop, and there were very few scholars in and around the town who were interested in the historic past of their vicinity. The number of wealthy and influential Catholics was small, and even those who could have supported the *Ohio Valley Catholic Historical Society* were too engrossed in the industrial progress of Pittsburgh to take a very deep interest in historical studies. The clergy and the diocesan authorities were equally uninterested. Most of them had come from abroad and their interests lay in other countries. Doctor Lambing's abilities were better recognized by the non-Catholics of Western Pennsylvania. When the *Old Residents' Association* branched out into the *Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania*, the *Ohio Valley Catholic Historical Society* was dissolved and Doctor Lambing became a prominent member of the non-Catholic organization, acting for a long term of years as its President. In January, 1896, Mr. Carnegie appointed him one of the Trustees of the Carnegie Institute.

It is regrettable that this worthy attempt at organizing the forces of the Catholic Church of that date for the purpose of conserving the history of the Faith in Western Pennsylvania came to such a poor end. Fortunately Doctor Lambing was not totally discouraged by this failure, and it has been solely on account of his preserving labors for the past thirty years that the relics of Catholic tradition in Western Pennsylvania have not been entirely forgotten.

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